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ABSTRACT

This paper describes how the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) operated the first study groups, what topics they investigated, what fruit they bore, and what the study group members and AEL staff later said they would do differently or the same way next time. Major topics discussed in the paper are: how groups were initiated and organized, what processes groups used, and how products and information were disseminated. The last part of the paper reports on the results of a survey sent to 1986-87 study group members assessing: (1) the importance of 33 potential topics; (2) the feasibility of using the study group approach to address these topics; and (3) the desirability, benefits, and potential problems in forming several new types of study groups. The survey form and a discussion guide are appended. (JD)



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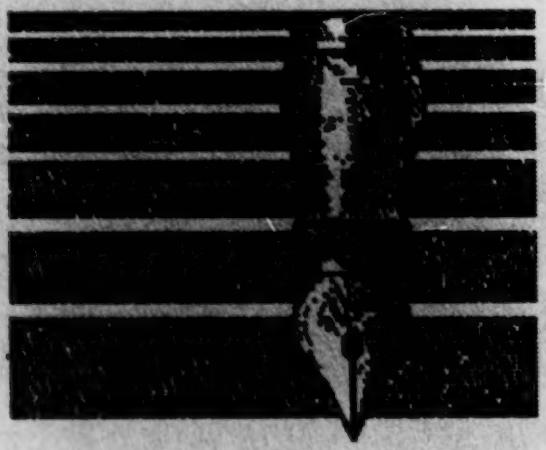

*Occasional Paper No. 024*

# The Effectiveness of the Study Group as an R&D Methodology

*by J. Jackson Barnette, Dennie L. Smith, and Barbara G. Burch*
*Memphis State University*

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*by J. Jackson Barnette, Dennie L. Smith, and Barbara G. Burch*
*Memphis State University*

*November 1987*

The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) is located in Charleston, West Virginia. Its mission is to work with the Region's educators in an ongoing R & D-based effort to improve education and educational opportunity. To accomplish this mission, AEL works toward:

- the improvement of professional quality,
- the improvement of curriculum and instruction,
- the improvement of community support, and
- the improvement of opportunity for access to quality education by all children.

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# Background

In 1986, the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) initiated a new strategy for involving educators in its work. Working with and through professional associations of teachers, school administrators, and school board members, AEL staff helped educators form study groups to look into issues of their own choosing. The idea was to get educators together to investigate a topic, develop a product as the result of that investigation, and share it with others in the Region.

During 1986-87, 13 study groups were formed—seven were facilitated by the AEL Classroom Instruction (CI) program and six were facilitated by the AEL School Governance and Administration (SGA) program. AEL supported these groups with technical assistance, information resources, a small stipend to cover some of the expenses, and final production and dissemination of the resulting research synthesis or report.

The purpose of this occasional paper is to describe how AEL's first study groups operated, what topics they investigated, what fruit they bore, and what the study group members and AEL staff later said they would do differently or the same way the next time. Major topics discussed in this paper are: how groups were initiated and organized, what processes groups used, and how products and information were disseminated. The last part of the paper reports on the results of a survey sent to 1986-87 study group members in April, 1987 (see Appendix A for survey form). The survey was conducted to assess (1) the importance of 33 potential topics; (2) the feasibility of using the study group approach to address these topics; and (3) the desirability, benefits, and potential problems in forming several new types of study groups.

In addition to the survey, information used to develop this occasional paper came from conversations with AEL staff and focused discussions with 1986-87 study group members at a Study Group Annual Conference held on February 7, 1987, in Memphis, Tennessee (see discussion guide in Appendix B).

# Section I: AEL's Approach to Structuring Study Groups

## General Guidelines

Study groups were initiated by two AEL programs: the Classroom Instruction program worked with state teacher associations and the School Governance and Administration program worked with state administrator organizations in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Based on their experiences in other groups, AEL staff from these programs formulated some general guidelines for structuring study groups:

- First, the size of the group should be small (10 or less). AEL staff believed it would be easier to maintain communications and divide the workload among a small group of people than among a large group.

- The group should be careful to select an issue or problem that is both important and feasible to address within the limits of a study group.

- Group members should determine their own processes and products in order to develop commitment to and ownership of the groups' goals.

- Study group costs should be small and shared by AEL, the involved association(s), individual participants, and their employers.

- AEL staff should help facilitate the organization and functioning of the groups, and should help disseminate study group products.

AEL staff decided to work through established educator professional associations for three reasons: (1) professional association involvement would help ensure that the issue or problem studied was important to a large group of educators; (2) the association was in the best position to identify potential group members; and (3) the association would have certain resources and mechanisms in place to help with group organization and logistics.

## Laying the Groundwork for Study Groups

There were clear advantages in working with professional associations. But how should staff approach these associations about forming study groups? What would be the benefits to the associations?

The groundwork for contacting the association hierarchy had already been laid in the structure of the AEL Board of Directors. The presidents of the leading teachers' and school administrators' associations for all four AEL member states appoint representatives to serve on the AEL Board and as members of the CI and SGA Program Advisory Committees. These Board members helped set up meetings between AEL staff and association boards members. At these meetings the advantages of participating were outlined as follows:

- *For individuals*—The benefits include involvement in a meaningful professional activity and the recognition that can come through subsequent reports and publications.

- *For those providing technical assistance*—Higher education faculty may realize benefits in authoring reports and products, and in contributing to their institutions' service mission.

- *For professional associations*—Study groups provide a vehicle for association members to become involved in meaningful professional activity directed at school improvement. The individuals and their association receive recognition for their involvement in reports, products, and AEL publications.

- *For AEL*—Benefits include identifying and organizing a cadre of individuals who have specialized expertise in the Region; the development of knowledge and products that relate to accomplishing AEL's goals of improving education and educational opportunity; improving AEL's visibility in its service region; and receiving help with the dissemination of R&D-based information.

## Types of Study Group Projects

Study groups were conceived as temporary organizational units, created to perform a specific and limited task. Study group members contributed their expertise and effort as volunteers in service to the profession. AEL encouraged members to consider undertaking one of three basic types of projects:

1. *Conduct applied research.* A group could create new knowledge about a specific topic leading to the production of a research report (design, methodology, and findings) and a practice report (utilization of findings).

2. *Conduct R & D-based product development.* A group could design, develop, and field-test a new product intended to meet a particular need in educational practice. The group would then write (1) a technical report of the R & D processes used and the field-test results; and (2) a practice report describing the product, its intended use(s), and the appropriate conditions for its use. The group would then finalize the product for dissemination.

3. *Conduct knowledge synthesis.* A group could translate existing knowledge into a form that makes it useful for responding in a practical manner to concerns confronting educators.

## Approaches to Forming Study Groups

Study groups were formed in two general ways. In one approach, the study group was formed first and then the study group members identified the issue or problem to be addressed. In this approach, association staff identified members who characteristically enjoy involvement in personal and professional development activities, have demonstrated willingness to become involved in special project activities, and are well known by association staff and much of the membership.

In the second approach, association staff first identified the issue or problem to be addressed, then they selected study group members based on individuals' interest and expertise in the topic.

Each of these approaches had associated benefits and problems, which are discussed later in this paper.

## Basic Resources Needed by Study Groups

Study groups needed three basic resources to conduct their work. Each group needed *leadership*—someone who would follow through on convening the group and keeping the group's work targeted and productive. Leadership was sometimes provided by a study group member, other times by someone external to the group, such as a senior associate, higher education faculty, or AEL staff member. In some cases, leadership was shared by a group member and an external person, when there was group consensus on which person was responsible for which needed leadership function.

Study groups also needed *technical assistance*. Study group members provided most of the needed expertise, but there was occasional need for expert consultation, specialized information, or technical assistance such as instrument design, data collection, data analysis, writing/editing reports, production of final products, and dissemination. This type of assistance was provided by the association staffs, AEL staff, and by higher education faculty.

Last, groups needed *seed money*. Study group members donated their time, but some money was needed to cover the expenses of travel, specialized materials, data processing, renting meeting room space, paying consultants, and for meeting other incidental needs. AEL provided each group $1,000 for these expenses. The associations helped defray the groups' expenses by providing printing, mailing, dissemination, and technical assistance.

# Section II. A Brief Description of the 1986-87 AEL Study Groups

The preceding section of this paper described the ways in which AEL organized its efforts to form study groups of teachers, school administrators, and school board members. This section describes the outcome of those efforts— the 13 groups that were formed and the products produced, beginning with the study groups that were organized and facilitated by the Classroom Instruction program. (Most products produced by study groups are available at cost from AEL.)

## Classroom Instruction Study Groups

- *Kentucky Education Association—Tips for Teaching Marginal Learners.* This study group developed a publication aimed at assisting regular teachers in the education of mainstreamed or slow learners. The tips included teacher-tested techniques gathered by a survey of more than 100 teachers in several states. KEA disseminated this publication through local district associations.

- *Kentucky Education Association—Keys to an Effective Internship.* This study group produced a guide for first-year teachers in Kentucky's internship program. More than 100 1985-86 interns responded to a survey seeking suggestions for making the assessment/assistance process of greater benefit to future interns. The guide was distributed to interns throughout the state through KEA local associations.

- *Tennessee Education Association—Parent Education Notebook.* This study group developed a notebook of over 40 activity descriptions that could be used by parents to aid students' skill development in six areas. Study group members conducted teacher awareness sessions to introduce the activity notebooks to kindergarten and transition-first-grade teachers and conducted parent orientation sessions in their districts. Using this notebook, teachers can select from activity examples keyed to student skill levels for at-home practice by students with parents. The notebook was printed and disseminated throughout Tennessee by the Tennessee Department of Education and the Tennessee Education Association.

- *Tennessee Education Association —Total School Computer Use.* Computer awareness sessions for administrators and teachers and self-instructional materials, including microcomputer disks, were the products of this study group. The study group conducted computer awareness sessions for administrators and teachers from several Tennessee school districts. Regional offices of the Tennessee Department of Education's computer education program are disseminating the self-instructional materials and disks throughout Tennessee.

- *Virginia Education Association—Professional Development Model.* The product of this study group was a professional development model that combined divisionwide needs assessment with a resource personnel directory to help people use the talents of local educators. Needs assessment data from several districts were used to identify topics and presenters for a regional conference attended by more than 300 educators. The study group conducted a workshop for workshop presenters prior to the regional conference. Descriptions of the needs assessment and resource personnel identification processes are available from AEL.

- *West Virginia Education Association—Teacher Evaluation Model.* This study group developed a teacher evaluation model which includes evaluation plans and processes based on research findings and review of district teacher evaluation plans. Study group members developed observation/evaluation rating forms, along

with several sections of the final document which included: self-improvement goals, purposes of evaluation, evaluation operational definitions, observation processes, and remediation. The model is designed to assist local school districts in improving evaluation plans.

- *West Virginia Education Association—Rural School Staff Development Model*. The product of this study group focuses on increasing teacher involvement in continuing education planning related to rural schools education. Study group members organized school development teams in their schools which conducted needs assessment and planned staff development (continuing education).

## School Governance and Administration Study Groups

Six study groups were organized and facilitated by AEL's School Governance and Administration program. Following are descriptions of each group's accomplishments:

- *Kentucky Association of School Administrators*. To learn more about the experience of Kentucky's first-year principals, KASA's eight member study group interviewed 37 first-year principals. The survey results were used to plan a training program and support system for Kentucky's beginning principals.

- *Kentucky School Boards Association*. This study group conducted a statewide telephone survey to assess public opinion of schools and school boards.

- *Tennessee Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development*. The goal of this study group was to learn more about and disseminate information about Project Star, a multimillion dollar study on class size effects.

- *Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals*. This study group, made up of elementary principals and guidance counselors, conducted a survey of principals and superintendents to define the emerging role of the guidance counselor in elementary schools. Results were analyzed and reported to the Virginia legislature and the public.

- *West Virginia Association of School Administrators*. To gather information about perceptions regarding state requirements on the use of instructional time, this study group conducted a survey of a representative sample of 400 elementary principals and 600 primary teachers. This study group has made recommendations to the state department of education relative to the goal of increasing reading achievement in grades 1-3.

- *West Virginia School Boards Association*. This study group conducted a survey of "opinion leaders" throughout the state to assess their opinions of schools and school boards. Also, the group conducted a needs assessment of their own membership to determine training needs of local school board members.

# Section III. Study Group Members Discuss Their Experiences

In February of 1987, AEL hosted a conference for study group members. During the conference, staff facilitated a focused discussion of the effectiveness of the study group as a professional development activity for educators. Participants were asked to record their answers to a number of questions regarding the A) organization, B) processes, and C) dissemination aspects of AEL study groups.

At the end of the day, staff collected the written comments; what follows is a summary of their contents.

## A. Organization of Study Groups

Study group members were asked for their perceptions of the organization and operation of study groups as a system for conducting, transforming, and using educational research and development. They were asked for their impressions, comparing how their group worked with how an ideal study group might work.

***The most important ingredients needed for effective organization of study groups seem to be hard-working, committed, and interested members, working on a worthwhile topic, facilitated by an effective communicator.***

**Selection of members.** All of the 1986-87 study groups were made up of members selected by the sponsoring associations. Criteria used to make selections were: previous involvement in association activities, interest in the study group topic (if the topic was selected by the association), willingness and ability to be involved, balance across geography, and balance across types of professional position held (not applicable to teacher study groups). Many of the associations selected some study group members who had some previous experience working with AEL. AEL tried to influence this selection so that there was an equitable representation by race and gender.

Having the association select members improved the chances that the group would be made up of highly motivated individuals who had records of successful and productive involvement in previous association activities and possessed statewide contacts. In addition, selection by the association promulgated association ownership and commitment.

The dilemma is in selection of members and selection of topic. If the topic is selected by the association prior to selecting study group members, then there is the possibility that selected members may not agree with the specific focus of the topic or develop ownership of the study group processes and products. On the other hand, if the topic is not selected by the association, then the association may have problems identifying appropriate and productive study group members.

There was widespread satisfaction with the manner in which the association selected study group members. A few study group members indicated a need for greater balance of members from different geographic regions or positions, but most felt this was attained. Almost all of the 1986-87 study group members indicated an interest in serving on a new study group, especially if the new group had a new topic to investigate.

*Recommendations:*

- Have members selected by the association.
- Ensure balance of geographic representation, position types, race, and gender.
- Ensure a mix of different points of view on the topic and technical skills needed by the group.
- Identify and select a few less experienced individuals who have demonstrated potential and interest in becoming involved in research-

based educational change efforts.

- Include a previous study group member, if possible.
- Select study group members who are interested in the topic, are able to commit the time and effort needed, and whose employing institutions support and encourage their participation.
- AEL should communicate with the employing institutions to obtain clearance and commitment for individual participation.
- Include some study group members who have had experience working with AEL.

**Size of study groups.** Most of the 1986-87 study groups had an average size of ten members. Some had as few as four and others as many as 15.

There was widespread satisfaction with the sizes of the study groups. Members believed the size of the study group should be determined by the nature of the topic and projections for the tasks to be accomplished.

There are potential problems resulting from study groups being too small or too large. Study groups made up of a few individuals may find the tasks too time consuming and involved to be performed along with other personal and professional responsibilities. In addition, a small study group is less likely to have a broad view of the topic and may lack the set of technical skills needed to accomplish the R & D-based goal of the study group. A study group that is too large may be hard to manage, may have too much diversity of opinion, and may provoke discrepancies in individuals' effort and interest that could affect group morale.

*Recommendations:*

- The size of the study group should depend on the topic and the projected set of technical skills needed to accomplish the study group goal(s).
- The size of the study group should permit a reasonable balance of work load across the group members.
- If a large study group is needed, clearly defined subgroups, with specific tasks and a chairperson, should be constituted.

**Selection of study group topic.** There were two primary modes of topic selection for the 1986-87 study groups. The most frequently occurring mode was the selection of the topic by the association. A few of the study groups selected their own topic from a general scope of topics set by the association.

Selection and refinement of a topic often required group process work and negotiation. In this area, the AEL facilitator was credited with being able to keep the group on task and productive.

While most participants were satisfied with the process of selecting topics for the 1986-87 study groups, many would have preferred that the group select the topic, even if the association provided a general set of topic options within a specific educational issue. There tended to be more satisfaction with the actual topic selected than in the manner in which the topic was selected. Some of the 1986-87 study group members indicated that they would have preferred selection of the topic based on a survey of association membership.

*Recommendations:*

- Study group members should have a meaningful role in the selection or focusing of the study group topic.
- Selection of the topic should clearly reflect educational need, based on current educational research findings.
- The topic must be one that can be addressed within the time and resource constraints of a study group.
- If time permits, collect information from association members to identify priority topics or provide focus for a general topic.
- If the study group selects the topic, membership on the study group should be reassessed to determine if other study group members should be added or if current members may wish to drop out of the study group.
- Have an independent facilitator (such as an AEL staff member) conduct sessions for selecting or refining the study group topic, taking into consideration all of the above.

**Funding of study group activities.** Funding support for study groups was minimal—$1,000.

Most of the 1986-87 study group members were satisfied with the funding. However, some study group members suggested the need to pay for release time of teachers to attend study group meetings and the need for budgeting the available funds. Some study group members felt limited funds contributed to being able to get

more committed individuals on the study groups or the ones that could finance the trips and expenses.

*Recommendations:*

- All participating organizations should contribute toward funding study group activities.
- The level of funding should be adequate to support costs other than personnel time.
- It should not be a personal financial burden for any study group member to participate.
- Study group members should be informed of financial contributions made by participating organizations.
- A budget for the use of funds should be set up at the start of the study group activities.
- It may be necessary to provide differential funding to study groups based on size of the groups and projected tasks.

**Commitment of individual study group members.** There was an extremely high level of commitment among 1986-87 study group members.

They felt they were asked to become involved in something that was important and worthwhile. There were some individuals who, because of lack of interest or other commitments, were viewed as not being committed, but this was clearly a small minority of persons. Making potential study group members aware of the time and effort that might be required prior to study group membership was cited as a critical need. Efforts by AEL and the associations to publicize and credit the study groups for their work increased member commitment and participation.

*Recommendations :*

- Select study group members who have demonstrated commitment to the improvement of education and have been involved in similar efforts or have the potential for doing so.
- Inform potential study group members of the level of effort and time needed to work on the study group.
- Provide public and professional recognition for the work of study group members.
- Ensure that study group members are using their skills and knowledge efficiently and effectively toward meeting study group goal(s).

**Commitment and ownership by participating associations.** Participating organizations demonstrated commitment and ownership in several ways: 1) the publicity they gave efforts they sponsored; 2) the financial support provided by the organization; 3) the extent to which the organization used or disseminated products to other audiences; and 4) involvement of association staff and officers as active study group members.

Most of the associations involved in 1986-87 publicized widely the efforts of their study groups, although a few study group members felt that the association was unwilling to endorse the study group until it saw the final product. The associations' financial support was viewed by most of the study group participants as being satisfactory; some study group members felt the associations were not contributing enough. Dissemination was an area of concern for some of the study groups, whose members felt their associations should have done more to use and disseminate their products. Study group members viewed the involvement of association staff and officers as being at a high level in 1986-87.

*Recommendations:*

- Participating organizations should publicize individual and group involvement in study group activities in newsletters, association journals, and at professional meetings.
- Participating organizations should provide financial support and ensure that participants are aware of the support being provided.
- Participating organizations should take the lead in the use of and dissemination of products produced by the study group.
- Participating organizations should be willing to follow-up on the use of study group products which have been disseminated.

**Summary: keys to the successful organization of study groups.** At the Study Group Annual Conference several keys to successful study group organization were identified. These were listed on the follow-up survey and respondents were asked to indicate the ones they considered to be the most important five. Based on the results, the chart on page 9 shows the keys to successful study group organization (ranked high to low):

The most important ingredients needed for effective organization of study groups seem to be hard-working, committed, and interested members, working on a worthwhile topic, facilitated by an effective communicator.

| Keys to Successful Organization | Percent Checked as 1 of Most Important 5 |
|---|---|
| • Study group members who are willing to work | 74 |
| • A worthwhile study group topic | 55 |
| • Good communication among study group members | 52 |
| • An effective facilitator | 48 |
| • Study group members interested in the topic | 45 |
| • Committed study group members | 42 |
| • Common purpose/unity of study group members | 42 |
| • Effective association leadership/involvement | 32 |
| • Outside technical assistance | 29 |
| • Diversity of study group membership | 19 |
| • Careful selection of study group members | 19 |
| • Awareness, on the part of study group members, of the time needed to serve on the study group | 16 |
| • Commitment of local school administrators for their staff to be involved in the study group | 16 |
| • Compatibility of study group members | 6 |

## *B. Processes Used by Study Groups*

**Leadership.** Members described three general modes of study group leadership. Either there was a study group chairperson, the AEL facilitator served as chairperson, or there was joint chairing by the AEL facilitator and a group member.

In most instances where there was a group chairperson, that person was selected by the association. While most participants were satisfied with this approach, several would have preferred that the study group members select the chairperson.

For the 1986-87 study groups, leadership was viewed by participants in up to four distinct, but related ways. Some viewed leadership in terms of AEL, some viewed leadership in terms of the AEL facilitator, some viewed leadership in terms of the study group chairperson, and some viewed leadership in terms of the association. Involvement of AEL and the association are being discussed in other sections of this paper.

When considering these different modes of leadership, certain potential problem areas must be addressed. Having a group member serve as chairperson may result in greater group ownership than having an "outsider" serve as chair. However, in some situations, particularly when the group is composed of individuals who are strong leaders, it may be more effective to have an independent person serve as chairperson. Concerns relating to the use of an outside person as a chairperson are: the tendency for group members to have less loyalty to the group and group leadership, the probable greater physical distance between the chairperson and the group, the possibility of social distance problems, and feelings on the part of the group that the outsider has little to lose or gain in the failure or success of the group. In addition, if the roles of chairperson and facilitator are being performed by one person, there is high possibility of role conflict, which could lead to group ineffectiveness. It is clear that the possible threats outweigh the possible benefits in having the

group chairperson being external to the group membership.

Participants were highly satisfied with group leadership, whether the group was led by a fellow member or an AEL staff person.

*Recommendations:*

- There should be a person who serves as the study group chairperson.
- It is preferable to have a chairperson from the study group rather than a person external to the group.
- Study group members should have some input into the selection of the chairperson.
- When more than one person serves as a study group chairperson, make sure that they are compatible, have clearly defined and different roles, and are perceived by participants as having different roles and responsibilities.
- When a person from an outside organization serves as a chairperson, consider using additional strategies to increase group ownership and commitment.

***The most critical keys to successful study group process seem to be: interest and commitment of members, knowing what needs to be done, facilitation, leadership, and planning. It is likely that deficiencies in any of these would tend to reduce effectiveness of the study group process more than other important, but less critical, elements.***

**Study group task definition.** One of the important first steps in the study group process is the definition of tasks. Many of the study groups defined tasks by stimulating discussion and "brain-storming" sessions. These sessions were focused on the relationship between the topic and perceived needs in the state.

As with all aspects of study group processes, task definition decisions made by members, rather than having them made by persons external to the group, will increase the probability that they will be carried out more efficiently and effectively since group members will feel ownership and responsibility. Task definition processes often require the assistance of a facilitator. The facilitator can provide an independent perspective on the possible tasks, information on task alternatives, information on the need for and availability of technical resources needed for completing tasks, and can independently assess the feasibility of conducting selected tasks in light of time, personnel, and fiscal resources.

Study group members in the 1986-87 study groups were very satisfied with study group task definition.

*Recommendations:*

- Task definition should occur early in the process.
- Task definition should be determined by study group members, rather than being imposed by cooperating organizations or the facilitator.
- An independent facilitator could be used to provide guidance, but not prescription, in the determination of tasks.
- Study group members should be identified to be responsible for completing certain tasks.
- A plan, including time-frame, should be developed as a part of task definition.

**Meetings: time, place, and frequency.** Most study group meetings were held in conjunction with other professional meetings where most or all of the study group members would be in attendance. There was wide variation in the number of study group meetings; some had only one while others met monthly. The modal number of meetings was around three or four.

Some 1986-87 study group members were concerned that there were not enough meetings and that the meetings held tended to be too long. Several study groups communicated via telephone to supplement or substitute for formal meetings.

*Recommendations:*

- Conducting study group meetings in conjunction with other association meetings is efficient in terms of costs and attendance.
- Study group chairpersons should ensure that study group members have pre-meeting information on agenda items so that meetings can be as productive as possible.
- Study group members should be made aware of the possible need for some long meetings due to the difficulties of getting study group members together to deal with critical matters in a timely manner.
- If possible, study group subcommittees

should be constituted of persons living near each other, who have specific tasks they can accomplish, and then report to the total study group.

- Use of telephone and computer-based communication should be considered as possible substitutes for formal meetings once the study group has organized, selected the topic, and defined the tasks.

**Use of subcommittees.** Study group subcommittees may be structured to deal with different aspects of a study group topic, deal with different tasks, or both. The need for such subcommittees is dependent on the complexity of the topic, the range of tasks to be accomplished, the timing of tasks to be completed within the overall scope of work, and the physical proximity of study group members.

Some of the study groups considered AEL a subcommittee and others reported having informal subcommittees made up of individuals sharing responsibility for certain tasks. Most of the 1986-87 study groups did not use a subcommittee structure. Of those that did, there was a high level of satisfaction with their use.

*Recommendations:*

Consider using subcommittees if:

- the selected topic has many different aspects to be addressed,
- there are identifiable tasks that require persons with different technical skills,
- the result would be the reduction of formal meetings, or
- the tasks to be accomplished cannot be reasonably done in a linear manner within the overall time frame of the study group's existence.

**Use of consultants or "associate members."** As needed, study groups may add persons as "associate members" or consultants to provide specialized information or technical assistance.

Many of the study group participants considered the AEL support staff as consultants or associate members. The most frequent roles mentioned for these individuals were for data analysis and report writing. While most study group members indicated high satisfaction with the use of consultants and associate members, a few indicated that it might have been helpful to have used them to a greater extent.

*Recommendations:*

- Consultants and associate members should be added, as needed, to perform well-defined tasks.
- Consultants and associate members should be recognized for their contributions to the study group in study group documents and products, whether or not they receive extra compensation.

**Relationship with AEL.** In the follow-up survey, study group members were asked to rate the importance of services and functions provided by AEL.

Study group participants were satisfied with the level of support provided by AEL and many indicated interest in learning more about AEL's services and being involved in further AEL activities. The two services provided by AEL that were rated most important were: technical assistance provided by AEL staff and the facilitator. The next two most important were funding and providing study group leadership. The three least important, although considered important by several study group members, were the study group sharing conference, the relationship between AEL and the associations, and consultants provided by AEL (other than AEL staff). In virtually every aspect of study group organization, processes, and dissemination, the role and effectiveness of the AEL facilitator were mentioned as being positive and effective.

*Recommendations:*

- The role and responsibilities of AEL within the study group should be delineated early in the process.
- While several staff from AEL may be involved in study group activities, there should be only one person serving as the major contact and facilitator.
- Services and technical assistance available through AEL should be communicated early to study groups.
- Service and technical assistance must be provided in a timely manner and be focused to the needs of the study group.

**Relationship with higher education faculty.** Most of 1986-87 study groups did not involve higher education faculty members.

Study group members whose study groups involved higher education faculty members felt the involvement was helpful, particularly for providing research information, data analysis, and report writing. Many participants from study groups not involving higher education faculty felt involvement was not needed,

although some felt it might have been useful and faculty should have been involved.

*Recommendations:*

- Determine the potential role and services that could be provided by higher education faculty.
- Determine any constraints to the involvement of higher education faculty.
- Determine the resources needed for involving higher education faculty.
- Work with AEL and associations to identify potentially useful higher education faculty.

**Use of R & D resources.** The central purpose for forming study groups was to generate new research or adapt others' research findings to develop useful products for educators. Therefore, the use of R & D resources was a critical component of the study group process. AEL provided most of the R&D-based information and technical assistance used by the groups. However, several study groups also used R & D resources provided by state departments of education and higher education faculty.

While most study group members were satisfied with their use of R & D resources, some felt the need for a more extensive literature search and others felt the need for receiving R & D resource information prior to meetings.

*Recommendations:*

- Identify the primary focus of the study group topic early to ensure that R & D resources are targeted to the specific aspects of the topic.
- Request R & D resources from organizations that can provide such services in a timely manner.

**Use of research principles.** Study groups were encouraged to use well-recognized principles of research. By far the most frequent mode of research for the 1986-87 study groups was the development, administration, and analysis of a survey. Other study groups conducted synthesis of extant research documents to develop new products.

Most of the study group members were satisfied with the use of research principles with a few exceptions who felt the study group survey instruments could have been better constructed.

*Recommendations:*

- Each study group should have some members who have understanding of and experience with research methodology.
- In order to increase the effectiveness of research methods, research questions related to the topic should be identified and agreed upon early.
- The study group should informally assess the research skills of the study group members related to the task definition and work with the facilitator to identify technical assistance needs as early in the process as possible.
- The facilitator should be familiar with a wide variety of research approaches and be able to present to the study group viable options for conducting the research, including the possibility of using multiple methods to increase reliability and validity of the findings.

**Use of outside resources.** Outside resources were provided for 1986-87 study groups by: AEL (for funding, technical assistance, information, facilitation, and dissemination), state departments of education (for information), associations (for funding, information, and facilitation), local school districts (for funding support in the form of providing substitutes for study group members so they could participate in study group activities), and higher education institutions (for information and technical assistance).

*Recommendations:*

- All participating organizations must be willing to contribute resources to support the study group.
- Contributed resources should be acknowledged in study group products and public information about study groups provided by AEL and cooperating organizations

**Keys to successful study group processes.** Keys to successful study group processes were identified at the Study Group Annual Conference. These were listed in the follow-up survey and respondents were asked to indicate which five they felt were the most important.

**The most critical keys to successful study group process seem to be: interest and commitment of members, knowing what needs to be done, facilitation, leadership, and planning. It is likely that deficiencies in any of these would tend to reduce effectiveness of the study group process more than other important, but less critical, elements.**

| Keys to Successful Processes | Percent Checked as 1 of Most Important 5 |
|---|---|
| • Interested and committed study group members | 72 |
| • Knowing what has to be done (objectives) | 66 |
| • The facilitator role | 53 |
| • Study group leadership | 44 |
| • Having a plan for the process | 41 |
| • Keeping on task/meeting deadlines | 34 |
| • Availability of technical assistance | 25 |
| • Formulating study group goals | 25 |
| • Communication among study group members | 25 |
| • Each study group member having specific tasks/responsibilities | 22 |
| • Knowing where to get help | 19 |
| • Sufficient number of study group meetings | 19 |
| • Availability of materials | 16 |
| • Ability of study group members to make it to meetings | 16 |
| • Effective study group meetings | 13 |
| • Involvement of all study group members | 10 |

## C. Dissemination of Study Group Products

**Modes of product dissemination.** The two primary dissemination agents of 1986-87 study group products were AEL and the associations. AEL provided information about study group products in its quarterly publication, *The Link*, included study group products in AEL training workshops, and conducted workshops at professional meetings using study group members as presenters.

Associations included information on study group products in association informational publications, published study group products or descriptions of products in association journals and newsletters, sponsored seminars or workshops at, or in addition to, state association

meetings, and disseminated products upon request to association and non-association members.

For many of the 1986-87 study group participants the nature of dissemination activities was unclear. Several study group members indicated the need for planning for dissemination earlier in the process than had been the case. This is particularly important if the useful life of the study group product is short. A little less than half of the 1986-87 study group members felt the useful life of their product to be up to three years, while slightly more than half projected the useful life of their study group product to be four years or more.

*Recommendations:*

- Develop a dissemination plan early in the study group process to include potential users, uses, and costs.
- Identify potential dissemination organizations as a part of the dissemination plan.

**Intended uses of study group products.** Many of the products were designed to inform education policymakers. Several other products were designed to be used for inservice training of educators, policymakers, and parents. Other products were informational and personnel resource directories or guides that could be used to deal with specific issues facing educators, policy makers, and parents.

It was clear, from discussions with 1986-87 study group members, that there was no shortage of perceived uses for the study group products. This feeling is evidence of the perception on the part of study group members that they had developed useful products and they were proud of their accomplishments. In addition, many wanted to be involved in dissemination activities.

*Recommendations:*

- As a part of the dissemination plan, identify potential uses of study group products.
- Keep in mind that no single product can deal with all aspects of complex issues.

**Intended users of study group products.** The 1986-87 study groups targeted a variety of audiences.

The group identified most often by the study groups as the primary user of their products was administrators (including superintendents, principals, and supervisors), followed closely by teachers and legislators. Other potential user groups were public/community, associations, state boards, governors, and state departments of education.

*Recommendations:*

- As a part of the dissemination plan, identify potential users of study group products.
- Keep in mind that no single product will have the same degree of utility to a wide variety of potential users.
- Target the product to the needs of one or two specific audiences identified as a part of the topic identification.

***Of the keys to successful dissemination of study group products, the most critical seem to be: having a useful/valuable product targeted to specific audiences, a plan for dissemination, having funds for dissemination, making presentations at workshops and conferences, and having a timely product.***

**Documentation of study group product impact.** AEL documented the impact of study groups for several reasons: to improve study group efforts in the future, to document the impact of the Lab's programs, and to provide associations with similar documentation of association involvement in improving education and professional development for their membership.

*Recommendations:*

The primary approach suggested for documenting product impact was follow-up with users of the product. Such follow-up could be conducted by having users complete an evaluation form included with the product, collecting information from the participating associations on the uses of the product, and observing settings where the product is being used for staff development or conference presentations.

**Keys to successful dissemination.** During the Study Group Annual Conference, study group members identified several keys to dissemination, which were later used to structure items on the follow-up survey. Respondents were asked to check the five keys to dissemination that they considered the most important.

Of the keys to successful dissemination of

study group products, the most critical seem to be: having a useful/valuable product targeted to specific audiences, a plan for dissemination, having funds for dissemination, making presentations at workshops and conferences, and having a timely product.

| Keys to Successful Dissemination | Percent Checked as 1 of Most Important 5 |
|---|---|
| • Have a useful/valuable product | 88 |
| • Have a specific plan for dissemination | 72 |
| • Have funds to support dissemination | 63 |
| • Make presentations at workshops/conferences | 59 |
| • Have a timely product | 53 |
| • Determine potential users | 44 |
| • Publicize product availability | 34 |
| • Put information in association publications | 32 |
| • Follow-up on the use of the product | 23 |
| • Have a reasonable cost for the product | 16 |

## Summary of Priorities for the Successful Organization and Operation of Study Groups

In previous sections of this paper, many recommendations have been made regarding the organization, processes, and dissemination aspects of study groups. Considering these recommendations, as well as the keys identified and ranked by study group members, certain factors emerge as being of high priority in the organization and operation of study groups.

1. Study group members should be selected by the association, taking into consideration the need for a balance by geographic region, position type, gender, race, points of view, and technical skills.

2. Study group members should be interested in the topic area, be willing and able to commit the time needed to work with the study group, and have the support of their employing organization for their involvement.

3. Study group members and their employing organizations should be made aware of the level of commitment and time required for study group involvement prior to the decision to participate.

4. Study groups should be initiated and initially organized by an independent facilitating organization working with the association leadership.

5. A study group chairperson should be selected with input from study group members.

6. The size of the study group should be determined by the nature of the topic and need for different types of individuals.

7. Large study groups should be made up of subcommittees having specific responsibilities and a recognized subcommittee chairperson.

8. Study group members should participate in selecting or focusing the topic being investigated.

9. The selected topic should clearly reflect educational need and be based on current educational research findings.

10. Once the topic is identified and focused, study group tasks should be delineated and planned, taking into consideration the resources and time available for the work. The group's efforts should be directed toward the development and dissemination of a realistic, specific

product designed to meet specific need(s) of educators.

11. Once the intended product has been identified, conduct at least an informal market assessment to determine potential users, uses, value of the product, timeliness of the product, and costs of the product.

12. All participating organizations should share the costs of study group operations and be recognized for their contributions.

13. Study group meetings should be held as necessary, be as convenient as possible, be well-planned, be efficient, and should be supplemented by other forms of communication.

14. A budget for the use of study group funds should be developed, reserving funds for operation and dissemination activities.

15. The facilitator should provide guidance and make arrangements for provision of information and technical assistance as needed and ensure that these are provided in a timely manner.

16. Strategies for assessing the use and effectiveness of the product should be determined.

17. Strategies for assessing overall study group efforts should be determined.

18. AEL and the associations should publicize the work and products of the study groups, including recognition of individual members of the study groups.

19. The sponsoring organization and the facilitator should maintain a role of independent facilitation and mediate only when it is clear that the study group is not progressing.

To aid in the organization and operation of study groups, a Study Group Check List, which reflects many of these priorities, is included in the Appendix C.

# Section IV: Other Recommendations for Future Groups

## Future Topics

A survey was sent to study group participants requesting their assessment of the relative importance of 33 issues that might be dealt with by study groups. In addition, respondents were asked to assess the feasibility of using a study group approach to deal with the issue and the type of study group (local, state, regional, or national) which would be most effective in dealing with the issue. Table 1, in Appendix D, presents the results of this set of items for the 33 study group members who responded to the survey. The importance and feasibility scales were 1-5, with 1 being low and 5 being high.

**Important topics.** The two most important issues to the respondents, indicated by the results of the survey, were:

- funding for education (4.52) and
- programs for at-risk youth (4.48).

Other issues having importance means of 4.0 or greater were:

- school effectiveness evaluation (4.27),
- support for beginning teachers (4.21),
- substance abuse/drug education (4.18),
- use of technology in education (4.18),
- class size (4.12),
- elementary guidance/counseling (4.12),
- inservice/staff development (4.12),
- school drop-out prevention (4.09),
- sex education/family life/AIDS education (4.09),
- parental support/ involvement (4.09),
- marginal learner programs (4.09),
- community support/involvement (4.06),
- teacher evaluation (4.06),
- educational reform movements (4.06), and
- classroom management (4.06).

Many of the remaining issues were between 3.5 and 4.0 on the scale. It may be concluded that there is no shortage of important issues to be addressed by study groups.

**Feasible topics.** The four issues considered most feasible for a study group to address were:

- school effectiveness evaluation (4.30),
- funding for education (4.21),
- programs for at-risk youth (4.19), and
- educational reform movements (4.18).

Other issues having means of 4.0 or above were:

- support for beginning teachers (4.09),
- classroom management (4.09),
- elementary guidance/counseling (4.06),
- class size (4.00),
- inservice/staff development (4.00), and
- teacher evaluation (4.00).

Most of the remaining issues had feasibility means between 3.5 and 4.0. It is notable that most issues that were considered important also tended to be issues that study group members thought would be feasible for a study group to address.

## Types of Study Groups

By far, the type of study group most frequently cited as most effective in addressing the issues was the *statewide study group*. Statewide study groups were considered to be potentially most effective in addressing the issues of: teacher certification, elementary guidance/ counseling, class size, gifted education/enrichment, basic skills testing, administrator evaluation, preservice teacher preparation, early childhood education, funding for education, career ladder/differential pay/merit pay programs, teacher evaluation, secondary guidance/ counseling, programs for at-risk youth, support for beginning teachers, academic competition

programs, support for beginning principals, and inservice/staff development.

Considering the ratings of importance and feasibility, statewide study groups might be set up for the issues of: funding for education, programs for at-risk youth, class size, support for beginning teachers, elementary guidance/counseling, and inservice/staff development.

*Local study groups* were considered to be potentially effective in addressing the issues of: community support/involvement, classroom management, parental support/involvement, discipline, and problems unique to rural schools.

*Regional (cross states) study groups* were considered to have some potential for being effective in addressing many of the issues, but statewide study groups were considered to have more potential. The two areas where regional study groups had the greatest potential were: problems unique to rural schools and school effectiveness evaluation.

*National study groups* were considered to have some degree of potential to address the issues of: educational reform movements, use of technology in education, sex education, family life/AIDS education, and funding of education.

Several of the issues were greatly spread out over the four types of study groups. The issues of: school drop-out prevention, substance abuse/drug education, sex education/family life/AIDS education, school effectiveness evaluation, use of technology in education, and educational reform movements were considered to be important, feasible, and potentially effectively addressed by at least three of the four types of study groups. These seem to capture the most pervasive issues facing American education and are considered to be the responsibility of persons at all levels of the educational system or they are issues where there is not general agreement on responsibility.

**Multi-association, statewide study groups.** Each of the 1986-87 study groups was organized through a single statewide association. It may be possible to organize study groups that had more than one cooperating association. The 1986-87 study group members' interest in such an approach was assessed.

- *Desirability*—Of those study group members attending the Study Group Annual Conference, 86 percent liked the idea of having statewide study groups formed from several associations, only 2 percent did not like the idea, and 12 percent were uncertain. There were clear benefits and potential problems identified by the 1986-87 study group members.
- *Benefits*—The two benefits rated most highly were: the opportunity to bring together persons with different perspectives, opinions, and experiences to deal with a topic of interest to all and the opportunity to share information, ideas, and expertise on common issues. Other benefits were seen as: the potential for increasing understanding and awareness among groups; improved communication, trust, collegiality, and networking; the possibility of developing consensus and commonality of goals; and ability to reach a wider audience with study group information and products.
- *Potential Problems*—By far, the greatest problem identified in implementing these types of study groups was logistics, including time, coordination, scheduling, funding, and travel. Several 1986-87 study group members cited potential for problems relating to association turf-guarding, lack of trust, and the tendency for the association to be too prone to advocate the association's position on issues. Other potential problems, cited less often, were: differences in group foci; different agendas, interests, and needs; the possibility of one group attempting to dominate; and problems in overcoming past histories of isolation, insulation, and prejudice of some groups compared with others. Although there are several potential problems, it is clear that there remains high interest in such an arrangement. Such a multi-association approach would likely require the involvement of an independent facilitating organization, such as AEL.

**Cross-state or regional study groups.**

- *Desirability*—Of the 1986-87 study group members attending the Study Group Annual Conference, 63 percent indicated that they liked the idea of having cross-state or regional study groups, 5 percent did not, and 33 percent were uncertain. Clearly, there seems to be more interest in within-state, multi-association study groups than cross-state study groups. Benefits and potential problems were identified.
- *Benefits*—The most frequently cited benefit was the sharing of information, ideas, and techniques. Other benefits cited were: development of a broader base of knowledge and ideas, increased communication, and increased

awareness of common problems and concerns faced by neighboring states.

- *Potential Problems*--As was the case with multi-association, statewide study groups, the major potential problems relate to logistics (funding, time, travel, and scheduling). Other than logistics, the only other frequently cited problem area was differences in state laws, requirements, and expectations of study group members.

# Conclusions

Focused, research-based, study groups have a high potential for developing many highly-useful products targeted to a variety of educational issues, concerns, and problems. There are, of course, limits to what can be done by a small group of individuals, with limited resources, working together over a relatively short period of time. However, a well-constituted study group, with strong leadership and facilitation, that is able to identify a topic, focus the topic to a manageable degree, and stimulate individual and subgroup productivity provides a powerful approach to the development of products that are useful to many other persons and organizations.

The major conclusions reached, as a function of the study of the 1986-87 study groups, are:

- The study group approach is an effective way, utilizing research resources and methods, to involve educators in identifying and responding to current issues, concerns, and problems.

- Study group members who are interested in the topic and have the time to become involved in study group activities find the experience personally and professionally rewarding.

- Study group work should be product oriented, should be targeted to specific audiences, and plans made early for dissemination of developed products.

- There can be high quality, useful products developed using very limited fiscal resources.

- The role of a facilitator, from an independent organization, is critical to the organization and operation of study groups.

- Resources, including R&D information and products and technical assistance, must be available as needed and delivered in a timely manner.

- The strength of the study group leader in organizing and keeping the study group on task is critical to the need to produce within a relatively short period of time.

- The study group approach has the potential for bringing together persons having different positions and affiliations for the purpose of dealing with common issues, concerns, and problems.

- Recognition of study group members and study group products in association and AEL publications increases ownership, commitment, and quality of products.

# Appendix A

MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE 38152

ter of Excellence - Teacher Education
Education Building 105
(901) 454-2310

March 18, 1987

Dear Study Group Participant:

If you were one of the participants in the AEL Study Group Annual Conference in Memphis, we want to extend out thanks for the input you provided on the organization, process, and dissemination of study groups. From that input, we have developed the enclosed survey. This survey has two purposes. One is to provide the opportunity for those who were not able to attend the conference to provide input and the other is to provide for verification and consensus on issues identified at the conference.

Please take a few minutes to complete the survey and return it in the enclosed pre-posted envelope. We would like to have all surveys returned by April 6, 1987. If possible please complete the survey today. I know that the longer I put off completing a survey the less likely it is that I will do it. Your input is greatly appreciated.

The code number on the survey is for our survey record keeping. Results will be reported by group and not by individual. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (901) 454-3410.

Sincerely,

J. Jackson Barnette

J. Jackson Barnette, Ph. D.
Associate Professor
401-A College of Education

STUDY GROUP SURVEY--March 1987 Code _____

Demographic Information

Present employment position _____

Where employed _____

Years in present position _____

Years working in education _____

What was your role in the study group?

____ Chair or co-chair ____ Member ____ Associate Member

To what education associations do you belong, and do you presently hold office?

| Association | Office (please specify) |
|---|---|
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

As a study group member, who did you primarily represent (association/ school district/organization)? _____

Starting on the next page are several issues which may be addressed by study groups. For each issue, indicate the IMPORTANCE of the issue in your setting, the FEASIBILITY of dealing with the issue using a study group, and the TYPE OF STUDY GROUP which you feel would be most effective in dealing with the issue.

1. How important is each issue in your employment setting?

   Importance scale: 1 = not important TO 5 = highly important issue

2. How feasible is it to deal with each issue using a study group approach?

   Feasibility scale: 1 = not feasible TO 5 = highly feasible

3. What type of study group do you feel would be most effective in dealing with the issue and most effective in disseminating useful information on findings?

   L = Local S = Statewide R = Regional (cross states) N = National

Please select only one in each column for each issue.

1 = not TO 5 = highly

| | Importance | Feasibility of using SG | Type of SG |
|---|---|---|---|
| School dropout prevention | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Support for beginning principals | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Support for beginning teachers | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Substance abuse education/prevention | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Basic skills testing | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Testing in general | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Class size | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Preservice teacher preparation | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Sex education/family life/AIDS education | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Early childhood education | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| School day/year extensions/ latchkey programs | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Career ladder/differential pay/ merit pay programs | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Academic competition programs | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Gifted education/enrichment | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Parental support/involvement | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Community support/involvement | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Marginal learner programs | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Elementary guidance/counseling | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Secondary guidance/counseling | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Problems unique to rural schools | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Inservice/staff development | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Teacher certification | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Teacher evaluation | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Administrator evaluation | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| School effectiveness evaluation | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Educational reform movements | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Discipline | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Dealing with pressure groups | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Funding for education | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Use of technology in education | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Classroom management | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |

| | Importance | Feasibility of using SG | Type of SG |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher "burn-out," educator stress | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| At-risk youth | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| Other issues | | | |
| _____ | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |
| _____ | 1 2 3 4 5 | 1 2 3 4 5 | L S R N |

Listed below are methods for selecting a study group topic. Beside each listing, indicate for your study group which method was used and which method you prefer.

Check one in each column.

| | Method Used | Method Preferred |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Topic selected by association and given to SG | _____ | _____ |
| 2. Topic alternatives selected by association and SG decides which to address | _____ | _____ |
| 3. SG identifies topics and selects | _____ | _____ |
| 4. SG leader selects topics | _____ | _____ |
| 5. Unknown | _____ | |

Listed below are methods for selecting study group members. Beside each listing, indicate for your study group which method was used and which method you prefer.

Check one in each column.

| | Method Used | Method Preferred |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Members selected by the association with no attempt to balance across professions or geography | _____ | _____ |
| 2. Members selected by the association with balance across professions and geography | _____ | _____ |
| 3. Members selected by association with balance across professions, but not geography | _____ | _____ |
| 4. Members selected by association with balance across geography, but not professions | _____ | _____ |
| 5. Members not selected by the association | _____ | _____ |
| 6. Unknown | _____ | |

Of the following methods for selecting a study group chairperson, which method was used for your study group, and which method would you prefer?

Check one in each column.

| | Method Used | Method Preferred |
|---|---|---|
| 1. The association selected the chairperson | _____ | _____ |
| 2. There was no chairperson | _____ | _____ |
| 3. The SG members selected a chairperson | _____ | _____ |
| 4. The facilitator served as chairperson | _____ | _____ |
| 5. Unknown | _____ | |

Do you believe it would be helpful to have a person in each new study group who has served in a previous study group? ____ Yes ____ No

Are you interested in serving in a new study group? ____ Yes ____ No

If yes, would you prefer to serve in a study group dealing with the same topic or a new topic? ____ Same topic ____ New topic

While all of the following are keys to successful functioning of a study group, check those which are, in your opinion, the MOST IMPORTANT FIVE.

Please check only five.

1. ____ Outside technical assistance
2. ____ Effective facilitator from an outside organization
3. ____ Awareness of the amount of time needed for SG participation
4. ____ Members who are willing to work
5. ____ Committed SG members
6. ____ Diversity of SG membership
7. ____ Common purpose/unity of SG members
8. ____ SG members interested in the topic
9. ____ Commitment of local school administrators for their staff to be involved in SG
10. ____ Good communication among SG members
11. ____ Careful selection of SG members
12. ____ Having a worthwhile topic
13. ____ Compatibility of SG members
14. ____ Effective association leadership/involvement

Of the services/functions provided by AEL, check those which are, in your opinion, the MOST IMPORTANT THREE.

Please check only three.

1. ____ Facilitator
2. ____ Technical assistance by AEL staff
3. ____ Materials/documents for SG use
4. ____ Funding
5. ____ SG sharing session (Memphis, TN)
6. ____ Relationship between AEL and association(s)
7. ____ Consultants provided (other than AEL staff)

While all of the following are keys to successful study group process, check those which are, in your opinion, the MOST IMPORTANT FIVE.

Please check only five.

1. ____ Availability of materials
2. ____ Facilitator role
3. ____ SG leadership
4. ____ Interested/committed SG members
5. ____ Knowing where to get help
6. ____ Sufficient number of group meetings
7. ____ Knowing what has to be done (specific SG objectives)
8. ____ Availability of technical assistance
9. ____ Keeping on task/meeting deadlines
10. ____ Each SG member having specific tasks/responsibilities
11. ____ Having a plan for the process
12. ____ Formulating SG goals
13. ____ Effective SG size
14. ____ Communication among SG members
15. ____ Effective SG meetings
16. ____ Involvement of all SG members
17. ____ Ability of SG members to make it to meetings
18. ____ Interim task/product review

What do you believe to be the useful life of your study group's product(s) in years? ____ 1 or less ____ 2-3 ____ 4-5 ____ More than 5

To date, how have information and/or products from your study group been disseminated? (Check all that apply.)

| | Type | |
|---|---|---|
| ____ Association journals | ____ State | ____ National |
| ____ Association newsletters | ____ State | ____ National |
| ____ Association meetings/conferences | ____ State | ____ National |

____ Workshops or seminars

____ In State Department of Education publications

____ In local newspapers/radio, etc.

____ To interested educators in local school districts

____ In AEL publications ____ ERIC

____ Product(s) are not yet available for dissemination

While all of the following are keys to successful dissemination, check those which are, in your opinion, the MOST IMPORTANT FIVE.

Please check only five.

1. ____ Having a useful/valuable product to disseminate
2. ____ Having funds to support dissemination
3. ____ Having a specific plan for dissemination
4. ____ Determining potential users
5. ____ Publicizing availability of product
6. ____ Making presentations at workshops/conferences
7. ____ Having a timely product to disseminate
8. ____ Putting information in association publications
9. ____ Following up on use of the product
10. ____ Having a reasonable cost for the product

What would be, in your opinion, the best balance of types of persons in a study group dealing with the issue your study group dealt with? Please enter the number of each.

| | |
|---|---|
| _____ Facilitator(s) | _____ Teachers |
| _____ Principal(s) | _____ Superintendent(s) |
| _____ Higher Education faculty | _____ Local school board members |
| _____ Legislators | _____ State Department representatives |
| _____ State Board member(s) | |
| _____ Professional association staff | _____ Curriculum supervisor(s) |

Others: _____ specify: _____

_____ specify: _____

Thank you for your assistance. You will be sent a copy of the AEL Occasional Paper which will be based on the results of the Study Group Sharing Conference and this survey.

# Appendix B

AEL
Study Group
Annual
Conference

# Discussion Guide

Crowne Plaza Hotel
Memphis, Tennessee
February 7, 1987

# Study Group Discussion Guide

AEL's Classroom Instruction (CI) and School Governance and Administration (SGA) program staff would like to assess the effectiveness of the study group as a professional development activity for educators. We also want to improve the experience for 1987 and subsequent study group members. Your suggestions will help us accomplish these goals.

The AEL conference sessions and this discussion guide are designed to capture your thoughts on the process and products of study group membership and your suggestions for improving these for group members and associations. We appreciate your candor in responding to the following questions.

## 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. State Discussions of Study Groups

1. Describe in two sentences the purpose and results of your study group's efforts to date, as you see them.

2. List possible topics for future study groups. These should be significant issues confronting educators in your state.

3. The CI and SGA programs may form study groups which draw from several associations or organizations within a state during 1987-1990. Do you like the idea of a statewide study group formed from several associations?

   ___Yes ___No

4. Name other associations with which your association may find collaboration useful.

5. In your opinion, what would be the benefits and problems with such collaborative study groups?

| Benefits | Problems |
|---|---|
| | |

6. Cross-state study groups of primarily teachers or administrators are another possibility. Do you like the idea of cross-state study groups?

7. What topics would members of your association want to study with members in other states of AEL's Region?

8. What are the benefits and problems with cross-state collaboration?

| Benefits | Problems |
|---|---|
| | |

## 1:45 - 3:00 p.m. Job-Alike Work Session--
## The Study Group: A Workable System for Short-Term R & D

We are interested in your perceptions of the organization and operation of study groups as a process or system for conducting, transforming, and using eduational research and development. In the pages that follow, please write your impressions of (A) how your study group worked, and (B) how an ideal study group model might function. For some topics, you may not have any firsthand knowledge or information. Leave that square blank--or write what you think happened. Try to respond to B for every item if only to write "same as A" or "no change recommended."

### Topic I: Organization

| Subtopics | A (Current) | B (Ideal) |
|---|---|---|
| Selection of topic | | |
| Size of study group | | |
| Selection of members | | |

| Subtopics | A (Current) | B (Ideal) |
|---|---|---|
| Expenditure of funds | | |
| Commitment and ownership by the association | | |
| Commitment of individual members | | |

**Keys to the Successful Organization of Study Groups:**

## Topic II: Process

| Subtopics | A (Current) | B (Ideal) |
|---|---|---|
| Leadership | | |
| Definition of specific task of study group | | |
| Meetings--time, place, frequency | | |

| Subtopics | A (Current) | B (Ideal) |
|---|---|---|
| Use of subcommittee structures | | |
| Use of consultants or "associate" members | | |
| Relationship with AEL | | |
| Relationship with higher education faculty | | |

| Subtopics | A (Current) | B (Ideal) |
|---|---|---|
| Use of R & D resources | | |
| Use of research principles | | |
| Use of outside resources | | |

Keys to Successful Process:

## Topic III: Dissemination

| Subtopics | A (Current) | B (Ideal) |
|---|---|---|
| How will information or product be used? | | |
| Who will use information or product? | | |
| How will study group results be disseminated? | | |

| Subtopics | A (Current) | B (Ideal) |
|---|---|---|
| How can assocations (study group members) help AEL document the use or impact? | | |

Keys to Successful Dissemination: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

## Optional

I would be willing to discuss my study group experiences with AEL staff or with the third-party AEL evaluator.

___Yes ___No

I would like a copy of my discussion guide responses. ___Yes ___No

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Work Phone: _____

**PLEASE RETURN THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE TO AEL STAFF BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE CONFERENCE. THANK YOU.**

# Appendix C



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## Study Group Check List

1. ____ Initiation of Study Group Process by sponsoring agency.

2. ____ Identification of potential problem areas or concerns of participating agencies.

3. ____ Invite participating agencies to form a Study Group to study a specific problem.

4. ____ Participating agencies elect or appoint members who have demonstrated leadership in the organization.

5. ____ Sponsoring agency is represented by one member who functions as a facilitator and liaison for the Study Group.

6. ____ Initial task of the Study Group is focused on clarification of the problem and assessing the resources within the group.

7. ____ One member of the Study Group is identified as the leader.

8. ____ Tasks and timelines are identified for the Study Group to resolve the problem.

9. ____ A product such as a report, video or staff development materials is identified for a specific audience.

10. ____ Individual group members have specific responsibilities and commitments to meet for the Study Group.

11. ____ Communication is incouraged between formal meetings through letters, drafts of reports and telephone.

12. ____ Meetings are conducted by the Study Group or sub groups on a timely basis.

13. ____ Final report or product is developed by the Study Group.

14. ____ Product is disseminated to the target group.

15. ____ Follow-up is made to study the impact of the product.

16. ____ Study Group evaluates its overall effort.

# Appendix D

Table 1, Responses to Importance, Feasibility, and Type of Study Group to Deal with Selected Educational Issues

| Issue | Importance Mean | Importance Rank | Feasibility Mean | Feasibility Rank | Study Group Type (%) Loc | St | Reg | Nat |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| School drop out prev. | 4.09 | 11.5 | 3.97 | 11 | 15 | 45 | 24 | 15 |
| Support for beginning principals | 3.61 | 25.5 | 3.78 | 21.5 | 22 | 53 | 22 | 3 |
| Support for beginning teachers | 4.21 | 4 | 4.09 | 5.5 | 19 | 56 | 22 | 3 |
| Substance abuse/drug education | 4.18 | 5.5 | 3.81 | 20 | 23 | 26 | 29 | 23 |
| Basic skills testing | 3.36 | 30 | 2.94 | 32.5 | 23 | 68 | 10 | 0 |
| Testing in general | 3.06 | 33 | 2.94 | 32.5 | 22 | 41 | 22 | 16 |
| Class size | 4.12 | 8 | 4.00 | 9 | 6 | 72 | 13 | 9 |
| Preservice teacher preparation | 3.78 | 22 | 3.84 | 19 | 3 | 65 | 23 | 10 |
| Sex education/family life/AIDS education | 4.09 | 11.5 | 3.61 | 26 | 25 | 38 | 9 | 28 |
| Early childhood educ. | 3.61 | 25.5 | 3.74 | 23 | 7 | 63 | 23 | 7 |
| School day/year ext./ latchkey programs | 3.67 | 23.5 | 3.78 | 21.5 | 24 | 42 | 24 | 9 |
| Career ladder/differential pay/merit pay | 3.18 | 32 | 3.27 | 31 | 3 | 61 | 27 | 9 |
| Academic competition programs | 3.33 | 31 | 3.36 | 30 | 18 | 55 | 27 | 0 |
| Gifted education/ enrichment | 3.52 | 28 | 3.55 | 28 | 12 | 70 | 12 | 6 |
| Parental support/ involvement | 4.09 | 11.5 | 3.85 | 17.5 | 33 | 36 | 24 | 6 |
| Community support/ involvement | 4.06 | 15.5 | 3.91 | 13.5 | 42 | 36 | 18 | 3 |
| Marginal learner prog. | 4.09 | 11.5 | 3.91 | 13.5 | 21 | 48 | 21 | 9 |
| Elementary guidance/ counseling | 4.12 | 8 | 4.06 | 7 | 9 | 76 | 12 | 3 |

Table 1, Responses to Importance, Feasibility, and Type of Study Group to Deal with Selected Educational Issues, continued

| Issue | Importance Mean | Importance Rank | Feasibility Mean | Feasibility Rank | Study Group Type (%) Loc | St | Reg | Nat |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Secondary guidance/ counseling | 3.67 | 23.5 | 3.58 | 27 | 16 | 59 | 19 | 6 |
| Problems unique to rural schools | 3.39 | 29 | 3.64 | 25 | 31 | 28 | 34 | 6 |
| Inservice/staff development | 4.12 | 8 | 4.00 | 9 | 28 | 50 | 16 | 6 |
| Teacher certification | 3.97 | 18.5 | 3.67 | 24 | 3 | 79 | 18 | 0 |
| Teacher evaluation | 4.06 | 15.5 | 4.00 | 9 | 21 | 61 | 15 | 3 |
| Administrator evaluation | 3.97 | 18.5 | 3.88 | 15.5 | 18 | 67 | 12 | 3 |
| School effectiveness evaluation | 4.27 | 3 | 4.30 | 1 | 27 | 30 | 30 | 12 |
| Educational reform movements | 4.06 | 15.5 | 4.18 | 4 | 3 | 39 | 21 | 36 |
| Discipline | 3.91 | 21 | 3.85 | 17.5 | 32 | 42 | 16 | 10 |
| Dealing with pressure groups | 3.55 | 27 | 3.45 | 29 | 27 | 33 | 27 | 12 |
| Funding for education | 4.52 | 1 | 4.21 | 2 | 3 | 63 | 7 | 27 |
| Use of technology in education | 4.16 | 5.5 | 3.94 | 12 | 18 | 30 | 21 | 30 |
| Classroom management | 4.06 | 15.5 | 4.09 | 5.5 | 39 | 36 | 21 | 3 |
| Teacher burn-out, educator stress | 3.94 | 20 | 3.88 | 15.5 | 16 | 47 | 25 | 13 |
| At-risk youth | 4.48 | 2 | 4.19 | 3 | 16 | 58 | 16 | 10 |

Means for Importance and Feasibility are on a 1-5 scale with 1 being low and 5 being high.

**Study group type:** **Loc = Local**
**St = State**
**Reg = Regional**
**Nat = National**